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UNCLAS AMMAN 006468

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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN PRISON HUNGER STRIKES END

REF: AMMAN 4529

1. Summary. Complaining of slow-moving court proceedings in terrorism cases, inmates began a hunger strike July 12 that spread to include, at its peak, 56 prisoners in three Jordanian prisons. By August 5, all of the protesters had ended their strikes. End Summary.

2. On July 12, five inmates at Qafqafa Correctional and Rehabilitation Center in the north of Jordan began a hunger strike to protest against the alleged slowness of the court system to issue verdicts in their cases. The five were part of a group of nine who were convicted by the State Security Court (SSC) in September 2000 for plotting to attack Israeli and Western tourists in Jordan. The group had originally received sentences ranging from seven years to the death penalty, but, according to the Jordan Times, their cases have been reviewed and their convictions overturned three times by the Court of Cassation. Each time the Cassation court ruled that some of the charges were covered by a 1999 royal amnesty. However, in April 2005 the SSC upheld its previous rulings, stating that the "final and decisive phases" of the plot were hatched after the amnesty was issued.

3. By July 17, seventeen inmates were engaged in the Qafqafa hunger strike, including Mohammad Shalabi, also known as Abu Sayyaf, who is blamed by the GOJ for inciting an uprising in Ma'an in 2002 that left six people dead (reftel). The following day, July 18, two inmates at Swaga prison started a similar strike to protest their prolonged detentions without final disposition of their cases. Jamal Degheidi, one of the two Swaga strikers, had been imprisoned for 14 months on a state-security related charge, according to press reports. Additionally, 28 inmates at the Juweidah Correctional and Rehabilitation Center staged a one-day hunger strike to express solidarity with the Qafqafa prisoners.

4. On July 25, the Qafqafa strike ended when the director of the Correctional Centres Administration, Colonel Saad Ajrami, and Qafqafa warden Colonel Hani Hiyari promised the inmates that their demands would be conveyed to the judicial authorities. The two officers then had a meal with the prisoners. The hunger strike at Swaga prison continued, however, peaking at 11 inmates. By July 31, seven Swaga inmates were still protesting what they claimed were unreasonably protracted judicial procedures. Five of these seven gave up their protest over the next few days, and the last two were persuaded to end their hunger strike on August 5 after Ajrami assured them that their demands would be also be relayed to the appropriate authorities.

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